guidelines. The program would provide grants to States to ensure the program elements are implemented in coastal communities.

The bill requires NOAA to establish, along with other agencies and academic institutions, a tsunami research program to continuously improve detection, prediction, communication, and mitigation science and technology to support tsunami forecasts and warnings. This program would also focus on the potential for improved communications systems for tsunami and other hazard warnings, including telephones, wireless and satellite technology, the Internet, television and radio, and any innovative combination of these technologies.

Another critical component of the bill requires NOAA to upgrade and modernize the U.S. tsunami detection system by December 2007, and provide accountability for the long-term operation of the system. NOAA is required to repair and upgrade the system, ensuring deployment of existing deep ocean detection buoys and related detection equipment, as well as notify Congress immediately not only of any equipment or system failures that will impair regional detection, but also of significant contractor failures or delays. In addition, the bill calls for the National Academy of Sciences to review the system for further modernization recommendations.

One of the changes we made to the bill resulted from testimony at the committee's February 2, 2005, hearing, and focuses on improving warning and preparedness for all coastal hazards, not only tsunami. The bill now contains a Coastal Community Vulnerability and Adaptation program at NOAA would encourage collaboration among Federal, State, local, and regional efforts through pilot projects focusing on: No. 1, development of vulnerability maps for coastal communities to a wide array of potential hazards; No. 2, better integration of risk management with community planning; No. 3, rick management leadership training for public officials; No. 4, development of risk assessment technologies; No. 5, new data services to support the new risk management activities; and No. 6, new risk communication systems. The bill would authorize $5 million annually for fiscal year 2006–2012 for the program.

The bill also recognizes the need for global coordination on tsunami preparedness, and as such, requires NOAA, and the interagency coordinating committee of the U.S. Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program, to provide technical assistance and advice to international entities as part of an international effort to develop a fully functional global tsunami warning system. The bill would also encourage nations to share information and funding for such activities.

Finally, the bill authorizes $35 million annually for 6 years to support tsnunami related activities. Through this legislation, the work Senator STEVENS and I started over ten years ago will step up to the next level, and provide our Nation with coverage and protection that it needs, while fulfilling our duties as citizens of the global community.

I believe that this bill will provide services of incalculable value to our Nation. The return on our investment may not happen this day or the next but it will happen. I hope that you will join me and my cosponsors in supporting enactment of the Tsunami Preparedness Act.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, Oregon's 363 miles of coastline are extremely susceptible to tsunamis. Just 2 weeks ago, at 7:40 p.m. on June 14, 2005, the tsunami threat became reality for those living on or visiting the coast. A 7.0 earthquake off the coast of California triggered an automatic tsunami warning for the entire west coast of the United States. The emergency response capabilities of these communities were put to the test. Fortunately, the warning was called off at 9:09 p.m. after it was determined that the earthquake failed to produce a tsunami.

Looking back, a lot of things went right. In Oregon, in cities such as Seaside and Cannon Beach, the alarms were sounded and people evacuated. However, there is a lot more that needs to be done. Models indicate that should an offshore earthquake trigger a tsunami, coastal towns will only have between 12 and 30 minutes before the first wave hits the beach. On June 14, for many people on the coast, the information would have come too late.

I am pleased that the Tsunami Preparedness Act, S. 50, of which I am a consponsor and strong supporter, will pass the Senate by unanimous consent today. The world has recently seen how potentially devastating a tsunami can be. America needs to take steps to prepare and be ready. Oregonians are acutely aware that, at some point, a tsunami could hit the coast of the United States. This bill will give our coastal communities opportunities that weren't afforded the victims of the tragic tsunami in Southeast Asia last year. It will harness the brains and expertise of universities, like Oregon State University and Oregon Health and Science University, to improve our tsunami detection and warning system and to make available the resources necessary to adequately prepare, inform, and protect U.S. citizens.

The U.S. has the tools to establish a top-notch national tsunami warning system and hazard mitigation program. Oregon universities are leading the way in tsunami research, and the practical applications of this research must be used. Our region, and the other vulnerable areas in the Nation, will benefit from better knowledge about the tracking, forecasting, and effects of tsunami waves. I look forward to the implementation of the Tsunami Preparedness Act and to reviewing the first annual report to Congress on the status and progress of work on this issue.

The committee amendment was agreed to.

AMENDMENT NO. 1101

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute)

The amendment (No. 1101) was agreed to.

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under ''Text of Amendments.'')

The bill (S. 50), as amended, was read the third time, and passed.

OCEAN AND COASTAL OBSERVATION SYSTEM ACT OF 2005

The Senate proceeded to consider the bill (S. 361) to develop and maintain an integrated system of ocean and coastal observations for the Nation's coasts, oceans, and Great Lakes, improve warnings of tsunamis, and other natural hazards, enhance homeland security, support maritime operations, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 1102

(Purpose: To develop and maintain an integrated system of ocean and coastal observations for the Nation's coasts, oceans and Great Lakes, improve warnings of tsunamis and other natural hazards, improve management of coastal and marine resources, and for other purposes)

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under ''Text of Amendments.'')

The amendment (No. 1102) was agreed to.

The amendment (No. 1103) was agreed to, as follows:

Amend the title so as to read ''A bill to develop and maintain an integrated system of ocean and coastal observations for the Nation's coasts, oceans and Great Lakes, improve warnings of tsunamis and other natural hazards, and for other purposes.''.

Ms. SNOWE. Mr. President, thank you for allowing the Senate to consider S. 361, the Ocean and Coastal Observation Systems Act of 2005. I must also thank my cosponsors, Senators KERRY, STEVENS, INOUYE, COLLINS, SARBANES, LAUTENBERG, LOTT, and CANTWELL. Their commitment to sound, science-based marine policy enabled us to craft this critical legislation that would do nothing less than revolutionize our understanding of the oceans.

This bill, the Ocean and Coastal Observation Systems Act of 2005, would create an integrated network of ocean monitoring systems around our Nation's coastlines, enabling comprehensive ocean data to be collected, compiled, and utilized in ways that enhance our safety, livelihoods, and overall quality of life.

Although 140 million Americans live along our Nation's 95,000 miles of coastline, most of these coastal residents would be surprised to learn how little we know about what happens at and below the sea's surface. Marine scientists strive to collect data on the biological, physical, and chemical properties of the ocean, yet many of their questions about our complex marine environment remain unanswered. Moreover, there is a tremendous and

growing need to translate data about ocean conditions into a form of information that people can use to improve their activities in and on the water—whether for marine science, resource management, and maritime transportation and safety.

Having more than 5,000 miles of shoreline, my home State of Maine has a strong heritage linked to the sea. Our coastal communities are highly dependent on the fisheries resources and other essential services provided to us by the Gulf of Maine, and for centuries our lives and livelihoods have required us to understand and adapt to ever-changing ocean conditions.

This critical need for information was the driving force behind the innovation that led to the Gulf of Maine Ocean Observing System, or GoMOOS. A partnership of marine science institutions and ocean-dependent organizations launched GoMOOS in 2001 with the deployment of ten observation buoys in the Gulf of Maine. Since then, these buoys have taken nearly continuous measurements of wind speed, wave height, temperature, fog, currents, salinity, turbidity, dissolved oxygen, and other key environmental variables. By modifying the instrumentation, scientists can gather other data from these platforms, and they can further link it to ocean information relayed by radar and satellites. GoMOOS compiles these data and makes it available to any ocean stakeholder via the internet, on a near real-time basis. Not only is this a tremendous public service to those affected by sea conditions, but it also provides a tremendous economic return—nearly $6 for every $1 invested—to the New England region.

The impact of GoMOOS in our region has been profound. Fisheries scientists and managers use this information to predict ocean conditions that affect productivity, and they are finding new ways to apply this information in resource management. Fishermen, sailors, Coast Guard search-and-rescue units, the military, and others who traverse the ocean are better able to predict safe sea conditions, and shippers can transport their goods more efficiently. Ocean scientists and regulators are better able to understand, predict, and rapidly respond to marine pollution and hazardous ocean conditions such as harmful algal blooms. Educators and students are learning more about marine science.

Of course, all States that border our Nation's oceans and Great Lakes would benefit from easy access to this kind of ocean information. Following the example of GoMOOS, more than a dozen ocean and coastal observing systems are being developed and implemented around the Nation, many in conjunction with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or NOAA, State coastal managers, universities, marine industries, and other regional partners. While these systems can provide valuable services to their region, we have found that they use different—and sometimes incompatible—methods for collecting, managing, processing, and communicating their data. When this happens, we lose the ability to develop a comprehensive assessment of coastal and ocean conditions around the Nation.

S. 361, the Ocean and Coastal Observation Systems Act of 2005, would facilitate action to correct this problem. This bill would coordinate the regional ocean and coastal observation efforts and link them at the national level under the leadership of NOAA. It would help further develop regional observation systems, link them through a nationwide network, and ensure public access to the information so that anyone, anywhere, at any time could better understand and track ocean and coastal conditions. It would authorize the National Ocean Research Leadership Council to establish an interagency program office that would plan and coordinate operational activities and budgets, as well as oversee a research and development program. Further, this bill would charge NOAA as the lead Federal agency to ensure that this national network of regional observation associations, such as GoMOOS and others under development, effectively integrate and utilize ocean data for the benefit of the American public.

As the U.S. Ocean Commission made clear in its final report issued in September 2004, ocean and coastal observations are a cornerstone of sound marine science, management, and commerce, and the potential uses of this system are nearly unlimited. As chair of the Subcommittee on Fisheries and Coast Guard and as a coastal State Senator, I am extremely proud to sponsor and support this bill. It is imperative that we in Congress facilitate the development and funding of a national, integrated, and sustained ocean observation network, and we can start by passing the bill before us. This bill, once enacted, will provide a tremendous public service along our Nation's oceans and coasts, and I thank my colleagues for supporting it.

The bill (S. 361), as amended, was read the third time, and passed, as follows:

S. 361

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Ocean and Coastal Observation System Act of 2005''.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSES.

(a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds the following:

(1) Ocean and coastal observations provide vital information for protecting human lives and property from marine hazards, predicting weather, improving ocean health and providing for the protection and enjoyment of the resources of the Nation's coasts, oceans, and Great Lakes.

(2) The continuing and potentially devastating threat posed by tsunamis, hurricanes, storm surges, and other marine hazards requires immediate implementation of strengthened observation and data management systems to provide timely detection, assessment, and warnings to the millions of people living in coastal regions of the United States and throughout the world.

(3) The 95,000-mile coastline of the United States, including the Great Lakes, is vital to the Nation's prosperity, contributing over $117 billion to the national economy in 2000, supporting jobs for more than 200 million Americans, and supporting commercial and sport fisheries valued at more than $50 billion annually.

(4) Responding to coastal hazards and managing fisheries and other coastal activities require improved monitoring of the Nation's waters and coastline, including the ability to provide rapid response teams with real-time environmental conditions necessary for their work.

(5) While knowledge of the ocean and coastal environment and processes is far from complete, advances in sensing technologies and scientific understanding have made possible long-term and continuous observation from shore, from space, and in situ of ocean and coastal characteristics and conditions.

(6) Many elements of an ocean and coastal observing system are in place, but require national investment, consolidation, completion, and integration at Federal, regional, State, and local levels.

(7) The Commission on Ocean Policy recommends a national commitment to a sustained and integrated ocean and coastal observing system and to coordinated research programs in order to assist the Nation and the world in understanding the oceans, improving weather forecasts, strengthening management of ocean and coastal resources, and mitigating marine hazards.

(8) In 2003, the United States led more than 50 nations in affirming the vital importance of timely, quality, long-term global observations as a basis for sound decision-making, recognizing the contribution of observation systems to meet national, regional, and global needs, and calling for strengthened cooperation and coordination in establishing a Global Earth Observation System of Systems, of which an integrated ocean and coastal observing system is an essential part.

(b) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this Act are to provide for—

(1) the planning, development, and maintenance of an integrated ocean and coastal observing system that provides the data and information to sustain and restore healthy marine and Great Lakes ecosystems and the resources they support, enable advances in scientific understanding of the oceans and the Great Lakes, and strengthen science eduation and communication;

(2) implementation of research, development, education, and outreach programs to improve understanding of the oceans and Great Lakes and achieve the full national benefits of an integrated ocean and coastal observing system;

(3) implementation of a data and information management system required by all components of an integrated ocean and coastal observing system and related research to develop early warning systems and insure usefulness of data and information for users; and

(4) establishment of a system of regional ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes observing systems to address local needs for ocean information.

SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act:

(1) COUNCIL.—The term ''Council'' means the National Ocean Research Leadership Council.

(2) OBSERVING SYSTEM.—The term ''observing system'' means the integrated coastal, ocean and Great Lakes observing system to be established by the Committee under section 4(a).

(3) INTERAGENCY PROGRAM OFFICE.—The term ''interagency program office'' means the office established under section 4(d).

SEC. 4. INTEGRATED OCEAN AND COASTAL OBSERVING SYSTEM.

(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The President, acting through the Council, shall establish and maintain an integrated system of ocean and coastal observations, data communication and management, analysis, modeling, research, education, and outreach designed to provide data and information for the timely detection and prediction of changes occurring in the ocean, coastal and Great Lakes environment that impact the Nation's social, economic, and ecological systems. The observing system shall provide for long-term, continuous and quality-controlled observations of the coasts, oceans, and Great Lakes for the following purposes:

(1) Improving the health of the Nation's coasts, oceans, and Great Lakes.

(2) Protecting human lives and livelihoods from hazards such as tsunamis, hurricanes, coastal erosion, and fluctuating Great Lakes water levels.

(3) Understanding the effects of human activities and natural variability on the state of the coasts, oceans, and Great Lakes and the Nation's socioeconomic well-being.

(4) Providing for the sustainable use, protection, and enjoyment of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources.

(5) Providing information that can support the eventual implementation and refinement of ecosystem-based management.

(6) Supplying critical information to marine-related businesses such as aquaculture and fisheries.

(7) Supporting research and development to ensure continuous improvement to ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes observation measurements and to enhance understanding of the Nation's ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources.

(b) SYSTEM ELEMENTS.—In order to fulfill the purposes of this Act, the observing system shall consist of the following program elements:

(1) A national program to fulfill national observation priorities, including the Nation's ocean contribution to the Global Earth Observation System of Systems and the Global Ocean Observing System.

(2) A network of regional associations to manage the regional ocean and coastal observing and information programs that collect, measure, and disseminate data and information products to meet regional needs.

(3) A data management and dissemination system for the timely integration and dissemination of data and information products from the national and regional systems.

(4) A research and development program conducted under the guidance of the Council.

(5) An outreach, education, and training program that augments existing programs, such as the National Sea Grant College Program, the Centers for Ocean Sciences Education Excellence program, and the National Estuarine Research Reserve Systen, to ensure the use of the data and information for improving public education and awareness of the Nation's oceans and building the technical expertise required to operate and improve the observing system.

(c) COUNCIL FUNCTIONS.—In carrying out responsibilities under this section, the Council shall—

(1) serve as the oversight body for the design and implementation of all aspects of the observing system;

(2) adopt plans, budgets, and standards that are developed and maintained by the interagency program office in consultation with the regional associations;

(3) coordinate the observing system with other earth observing activities including the Global Ocean Observing System and the Global Earth Observing System of Systems;

(4) coordinate and administer programs of research, development, education, and outreach to support improvements to and the operation of an integrated ocean and coastal observing system and to advance the understanding of the oceans;

(5) establish pilot projects to develop technology and methods for advancing the development of the observing system;

(6) provide, as appropriate, support for and representation on United States delegations to international meetings on ocean and coastal observing programs; and

(7) in consultation with the Secretary of State, coordinate relevant Federal activities with those of other nations.

(d) INTERAGENCY PROGRAM OFFICE.—The Council shall establish an interagency program office to be known as ''OceanUS''. The interagency program office shall be responsible for program planning and coordination of the observing system. The interagency program office shall—

(1) prepare annual and long-term plans for consideration by the Council for the design and implementation of the observing system that promote collaboration among Federal agencies and regional associations in developing the global and national observing systems, including identification and refinement of a core set of variables to be measured by all systems;

(2) coordinate the development of agency priorities and budgets for implementation of the observing system, including budgets for the regional associations;

(3) establish and refine standards and protocols for data management and communications, including quality standards, in consultation with participating Federal agencies and regional associations;

(4) develop a process for the certification of the regional associations and their periodic review and recertification;

(5) establish an external technical committee to provide biennial review of the observing system; and

(6) provide for opportunities to partner or contract with private sector companies in deploying ocean observation system elements.

(e) LEAD FEDERAL AGENCY.—The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration shall be the lead Federal agency for implementation and operation of the observing system. Based on the plans prepared by the interagency program office and adopted by the Council, the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration shall—

(1) coordinate implementation, operation and improvement of the observing system;

(2) establish efficient and effective adininistrative procedures for allocation of funds among Federal agencies and regional associations in a timely manner and according to the budget adopted by the Council;

(3) implement and maintain appropriate elements of the observing system;

(4) provide for the migration of scientific and technological advances from research and development to operational deployment;

(5) integrate and extend existing programs and pilot projects into the operational observation system;

(6) certify regional associations that meet the requirements of subsection (f); and

(7) integrate the capabilities of the National Coastal Data Development Center and the Coastal Services Center of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and other appropriate centers, into the observing system for the purpose of assimilating, managing, disseminating, and archiving data from regional observation systems and other observation systems.

(f) REGIONAL ASSOCIATIONS OF OCEAN AND COASTAL OBSERVING SYSTEMS.—The Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration may certify one or more regional associations to be responsible for the development and operation of regional ocean and coastal observing systems to meet the information needs of user groups in the region while adhering to national standards. To be certifiable by the Administrator, a regional association shall—

(1) demonstrate an organizational structure capable of supporting and integrating all aspects of ocean and coastal observing and information programs within a region;

(2) operate under a strategic operations and business plan that details the operation and support of regional ocean and coastal observing systems pursuant to the standards established by the Council;

(3) provide information products for multiple users in the region;

(4) work with governmental entities and programs at all levels within the region to provide timely warnings and outreach to protect the public; and

(5) meet certification standards developed by the interagency program office in conjunction with the regional associations and approved by the Council.

Nothing in this Act authorizes a regional association to engage in lobbying activities (as defined in section 3(7) of the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 (2 U.S.C. 1602(7)).

(g) CIVIL LIABILITY.—For purposes of section 1346(b)(1) and chapter 171 of title 28, United States Code, the Suits in Admiralty Act (46 U.S.C. App. 741 et seq.), and the Public Vessels Act (46 U.S.C. App. 781 et seq.), any regional ocean and coastal observing system that is a designated part of a regional association certified under this section shall, in carrying out the purposes of this Act, be deemed to be part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and any employee of such system, while acting within the scope of his or her employment in carrying out such purposes, shall be deemed to be an employee of the Government.

SEC. 5. RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT, AND EDUCATION.

The Council shall establish programs for research, development, education, and outreach for the ocean and coastal observing system, including projects under the National Oceanographic Partnership Program, consisting of the following:

(1) Basic research to advance knowledge of ocean and coastal systems and ensure continued improvement of operational products, including related infrastructure and observing technology.

(2) Focused research projects to improve understanding of the relationship between the coasts and oceans and human activities.

(3) Large scale computing resources and research to advance modeling of ocean and coastal processes.

(4) A coordinated effort to build public education and awareness of the ocean and coastal environment and functions that integrates ongoing activities such as the National Sea Grant College Program, the Centers for Ocean Sciences Education Excellence, and the National Estuarine Research Reserve System.

SEC. 6. INTERAGENCY FINANCING.

The departments and agencies represented on the Council are authorized to participate in interagency financing and share, transfer, receive, obligate, and expend funds appropriated to any member of the Council for the

purposes of carrying out any administrative or programmatic project or activity under this Act or under the National Oceanographic Partnership Program, including support for the interagency program office, a common infrastructure, and system integration for a ocean and coastal observing system. Funds may be transferred among such departments and agencies through an appropriate instrument that specifies the goods, services, or space being acquired from another Council member and the costs of the same.

SEC. 7. APPLICATION WITH OUTER CONTINENTAL SHELF LANDS ACT.

Nothing in this Act supersedes, or limits the authority of the Secretary of the Interior under the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (43 U.S.C. 1331 et seq.).

SEC. 8. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

There are authorized to be appropriated to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for the implementation of an integrated ocean and coastal observing system under section 4, and the research and development program under section 5, including financial assistance to the interagency program office, the regional associations for the implementation of regional ocean and coastal observing systems, and the departments and agencies represented on the Council, $150,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2006 through 2010. At least 50 percent of the sums appropriated for the implementation of the integrated ocean and coastal observing system under section 4 shall be allocated to the regional associations certified under section 4(f) for implementation of regional ocean and coastal observing systems. Sums appropriated pursuant to this section shall remain available until expended.

SEC. 9. REPORTING REQUIREMENT.

Not later than March 31, 2010, the President, acting through the Council, shall transmit to Congress a report on the programs established under sections 4 and 5. The report shall include a description of activities carried out under the programs, an evaluation of the effectiveness of the programs, and recommendations concerning reauthorization of the programs and funding levels for the programs in succeeding fiscal years.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, the Committee on Commerce, Science, and transportation, which I co-chair with my good-friend Senator DANIEL INOUYE, has unanimously passed out of committee, four bills to protect our oceans and enhance the collective knowledge of the marine environment. The Senate just passed these four bills by unanimous consent, and I look forward to working with the House to get this important legislation enacted into law.

Water covers over 70 percent of the Earth's surface. It is estimated that 80 percent of life on Earth is in the oceans. The Atlantic, Pacific, and Arctic Oceans, and the Gulf of Mexico, make up the waters of the United States Exclusive Economic Zone. In fact, the Pacific Ocean alone covers nearly an entire hemisphere of the globe. But little is known about these waters.

The four bills the Senate passed today will provide greater understanding of the complex ocean environment. Together, they will increase the coordination and effectiveness of the Federal agencies that contribute to the research and management of these critical marine ecosystems.

The four bills are: S. 50, the Tsunami Preparedness Act; S. 39, the National Ocean Exploration Program Act; S. 361, the Ocean and Coastal Observation System Act of 2005; and S. 362, the Marine Debris Research, Prevention, and Reduction Act of 2005.

The Tsunami Preparedness Act is the first bill that Senator Inouye and I drafted as the new Co-chairmen of the Commerce Committee. It was developed in the wake of the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami that took lives in 11 countries and provides an expanded tsunami detection and warning system for the United States. The bill authorizes the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA, to establish, operate, and maintain a dependable national tsunami warning system that would provide maximum tsunami detection capability for the Nation. The system would build on the model established in the Pacific, and provide for its repair, expansion and modernization by the close of calendar year 2007. In addition, the bill directs NOAA to provide any necessary technical support or other assistance to international efforts to establish regional tsunami detection and warning systems in other parts of the world, including the Indian Ocean.

I wrote the next bill, National Ocean Exploration Program Act, for the simple fact that very little is known about our oceans and more research and exploration is desperately needed. Approximately 95 percent of the ocean floor remains unexplored, much of it located in the polar-regions and southern ocean. We know more about the surface of the moon than the ocean floor; this bill is intended to change that. The National Ocean Exploration Program Act establishes a national program within NOAA to conduct inter-disciplinary ocean exploration voyages in partnership with other Federal agencies or academic institutions. The Act will strengthen interagency coordination on ocean exploration for the purposes of developing and facilitating the transfer of new exploration technologies, communication infrastructure, and data management systems to the Program. The bill gives priority attention to the exploration of deep ocean regions to make exciting new discoveries. In addition, it will promote the development of improved oceanographic research, communication, navigation, and data collection systems, in an effort to increase understanding of the ocean environment.

The Ocean and Coastal Observation System Act of 2005, developed by Senator SNOWE, will also contribute to our knowledge of the oceans with greater monitoring and observation of this dynamic environment. The bill will establish a national, integrated ocean and coastal observing system that will collect, compile, and make available data on ocean conditions in the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone, including the Great Lakes. The ocean and coastal observation system will help improve weather and flood forecasting, promote understanding of climatic variability processes, enhance safety and efficiency of marine operations, facilitate research, improve management of marine and coastal ecosystems, and provide information to raise public awareness of oceans.

And finally there is the Marine Debris Research, Prevention, and Reduction Act of 2005. Authored by Senator INOUYE, this bill responds to the immediate need to prevent and reduce significantly the amount of trash that is collecting in our oceans. The bill establishes separate programs within NOAA and the Coast Guard to identify, assess, reduce and prevent marine debris and its adverse impacts on the marine environment and navigation safety. In addition the bill creates an Interagency Committee on Marine Debris to coordinate federal efforts to prevent and reduce marine debris.

I look forward to the new information and management capabilities these bills will provide. Alaska has more coastline than the rest of the country combined. The oceans are a vital part of our way of life, and we depend on sound scientific research to maintain them. These bills are important to increase our efforts to be good stewards of our oceans.

I thank my colleagues on the Commerce Committee and those in the Senate for their overwhelming support of these bills.

DISCHARGE AND REFERRAL—S. 759

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent the Committee on the Judiciary be discharged from further consideration of S. 759, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to make higher education more affordable and for other purposes, and that the bill be referred to the Committee on Finance.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRAINING FOR REALTIME WRITERS ACT OF 2005

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 142, S. 268.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 268) to provide competitive grants for training court reporters and closed captioners to meet requirements for realtime writers under the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill, which had been reported from the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, with amendments, as follows:

[Strike the parts shown in black brackets and insert the parts shown in italic.]

S. 268

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,